

*BATTLE OF LA FERE  
CHAMPENOISE.*

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no such thing. The movement was directed on Paris, while Blucher, who had re-occupied Chalons-sur-Marne, marched to meet Prince Schwartzenberg, and Napoleon, thinking to cut off their retreat, was himself cut off from the possibility of returning to Paris. Everything then depended on the defence of Paris, or, to speak more correctly, it seemed possible, by sacrificing the capital, to prolong for a few days the existence of the phantom of the Empire which was rapidly vanishing. On the 26th was fought the battle of Fere Champenoise, where, valor yielding to numbers, Marshals Marmont and Mortier were obliged to retire upon Sezanne after sustaining considerable loss.

It was on the 26th of March, and I beg the reader to bear this date in mind, that Napoleon suffered a loss which, in the circumstances in which he stood, was irreparable.<sup>1</sup> At the battle of Fere Champenoise the Allies captured a convoy consisting of nearly all the remaining ammunition and stores of the army, a vast quantity of arms, caissons, and equipage of all kinds. The whole became the prey of the Allies, who published a bulletin announcing this important capture. A copy of this order of the day fell into the hands of Marshal Macdonald, who thought that such news ought immediately to be communicated to the Emperor. He therefore repaired himself to the headquarters of Napoleon, who was then preparing to recover Vitry-le-FranQais, which was occupied by the Prussians. The Marshal, with a view of dissuading the Emperor from what he considered a vain attempt, presented him with the bulletin.

This was on the morning of the 27th : Napoleon would not believe the news. "No !" said he to the Marshal, " you are deceived, this cannot be true." Then perusing the bulletin with more attention. "Here," said he, "look yourself. This is the 27th, and the bulletin is dated the 29th. You see the

<sup>1</sup> The battle of La Fere Champenoise was fought on the 25th not the 26th March (see *Thiers*, tome xvii. p. 562), and was remarkable for two things. The artillery of the Allies fired on one another for some little time, and a column of French National Guards, 5000 odd strong, who had only joined the army ten days before, made a desperate and honorable resistance to the enormously superior forces

brought against them; see Muffling, *Passages from my Life*, pp. 502, 503, and *Jomini*, tome iv. pp. 581, 682.